

Pastor Letter: The Relevance of Time (11/17/22)

One of the themes of this week's scripture passages is "Time" and the significance of the various aspects of time. The earliest memories of time that I can recall were those special holidays gatherings and those routine Sunday afternoon family meals at my grandparent's house after our local church services.

Staying with my grandparents taught me the importance of a daily, monthly, and yearly schedule. The cows were watered, fed and milked well before breakfast and supper. Old Peg, the cow dog, somehow knew the exact time to bring the cows in from the pasture, if they were not waiting in the paddock. The pigs and chickens lived by their own timetable and had ways of reminding us when we deviated from the daily schedule. The farm crops, garden vegetables, and fruit trees had a regimented season of planting, tilling, fertilizing, and harvesting that was controlled mainly by the weather.

When I was 9 years old, our family moved to a suburb city of Atlanta, GA for 7 years. I was introduced to a southern culture that operated at a much slower lifestyle, language, and assessment of time. This is where I first began to realize that not everyone operates on the same timetable, importance of schedules, or value systems.

Marriage and the birth of our children caused a complete reorganization of my internal clock and understanding of the significance of time, seasons, and scheduling. I rapidly deduced that my time was not my own and scheduling was nearly impossible.

My education as a chemist and my employment in an analytical laboratory further introduced an entirely new culture of time management. Laboratory testing was of a repetitive nature that required a stringent scheduling of samples, analytical testing, and observing laboratory results. Each of my instruments were connected to a computer which was brought into questioning during the Y2K crisis at the date change of the new century. When new quality control programs were introduced, each of my laboratory timers were required to be calibrated and verified against an official atomic clock in Colorado or England. Once again as a supervising chemist, I realized that not everyone operates on the same timetable, importance of schedules, or value systems in a lab.

Once I became a called pastor, I quickly learned that I had to operate on God's schedule and in His timeframe. Telephone calls, hospital visits, marriages, funerals, and counseling sessions randomly occur because a parishioner is seeking assistance. I also realized for the third time that not everyone operates on the same timetable, importance of schedules, or value systems in a church congregation.

Our Old Testament passage comes from the oracles of the prophet Isaiah. The book of Isaiah is scholastically broken down into three segments that occur in three different timeframes. First Isaiah deals with Judah's judgment in Israel and in Babylon. Second Isaiah is concerned with Israel's captivity in Babylon. Third Isaiah documents the return home and the rebuilding of the nation, Jerusalem, and the Temple.

Our scripture from first Isaiah is a poetic oracle that highlights a futuristic time period concerning "The Day of the Lord" and the influx of the Kingdom of God. Isaiah points out that the Lord will set up his Kingdom in the Temple in Jerusalem, "In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it," (Isa. 2:2). All the nations will come to the Lord for instruction in the Torah and learn to follow Almighty God, "Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may

walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem," (v. 3).

The Lord will establish his Kingdom of peace and well-being, "He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore," (v. 4).

This week begins the liturgical calendar of the Christian church year with the first Sunday of Advent, which means "coming." We are celebrating the "coming of Christ." The apostle Paul highlights our theme of "time" and the second coming of Christ in his epistle to the Roman Church. Paul directs his readers to awaken from their slumber and embrace the coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God, "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers," (Rom. 13:11). Paul is instructing his readers that although they have accepted Christ as their Savior, they should be living the Christian lifestyle and watching for the Second Coming of their Lord.

Paul warns of avoiding being tempted with the sins of darkness by embracing the Christian faith and putting on the weapons of spiritual warfare, "the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, (vv. 12-13).

On this first Sunday of Advent, we too should take stock in this week's passages that look forward to the end times instead of completely dwelling on Christ's first coming. If we are focusing on the secular world's celebration of Christmas, we will miss the signs of the end times and not be prepared for the second coming of our Lord. We must always remember that as Christians, we are part of the "already but not yet Kingdom of God." It is crucial that we heed the words of Paul that we should awaken from our slumber and be constantly prepared for the coming "Day of the Lord" and Christ's ushering in the eternal Kingdom of God.

To insure we are constantly prepared for that glorious day, we can use Paul's suggestion of being empowered by the Living Word as we focus our attention on Christ, "Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires," (v 14).

As I serve the Presbyterian Church, I have sadly become aware that not everyone operates on the same timetable, importance of schedules, or value systems when it comes to embracing the significance of the Christian lifestyle, Kingdom of God, or second coming of Christ. Matthew records the words of Jesus Christ concerning the end times, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father... Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming," (vv. 24:36, 42).

As we begin this new liturgical year in the life of Jesus Christ, may each one of us fully embrace the significance of the time we are given by God and the relevance of the Gospel message of salvation for a fallen world. Season's Greetings,

Pastor Larry

